

Prevention or Intervention?: A Diversified Mediation Approach
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Diversity as Education—Prevention

Keeping our children in school means keeping them interested in what is being taught. The teaching profession is under attack from cost-benefit analysis gurus who believe that quality education can be measured in numbers, statistics, and other quantitative measures. However, it is as important to consider those qualitative measures that often are pushed aside for the (often) arbitrary assessment guidelines. The comments by Michele Foster who reports educator Ora Benson as stating that “[s]ince your experiences influence how you [the teacher] see the world they can’t be dismissed, brushed aside, or ignored” (p. 21); A. Suresh Canagarajah who notes a “heightened consciousness of [African American students’] ethnic identity” (p. 178); and Elizabeth Peterson who suggests that contextualizing lessons in life stories confirm that “what [African American students] were learning could be useful” (p. 88) all reflect pedagogical issues to consider.

Lisa Delpit (1995) offers a cautionary note: “A primary source of stereotyping is often the teacher education program itself. It is in these programs that teachers learn that poor students and students of color should be expected to achieve less than their “mainstream” counterparts” (p. 172). Educational theorists understand that it is these assumptions about teaching that impact our students, who intuitively understand that they are not expected to succeed and therefore look to other ways of legitimizing themselves—often through destructive means.

Diversity as a Mediation Approach—Intervention

When the student is taken from the educational context and introduced to the legal (and not “justice”) system, they are given a label that recontextualizes their identity. These students are now “juveniles,” and any contributions they may have been able to make to society are now tarnished by a sense of being a lesser citizen, effectively banishing them to a secondary-class status. Often juvenile “offenders” (notice the negative and diversive language associated with this “non-productive” citizen) are labeled as non-conformists, trouble-makers, uneducatable, and a blemish on society.

While critical race theory examines and analyzes many of the same issues as educational theorists, and considers how those issues impact the individual, critical race theory also focuses on “studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p. 2). Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic define racism as “any program or practice of discrimination, segregation, persecution, or mistreatment based on membership in a race or ethnic group” (p. 154). Thus, critical race theory examines race and racism within economics,

education, politics, history, various social contexts, and individual-community interests from the viewpoints of various disciplinary areas.

I argue that mediation practices should also consider not only the why and how of best practices, but also the “when.” Rather than mediation being a solution to address how the juvenile offender apologizes to the offended victim through conflict resolution techniques, perhaps mediation can be transformed to addressing how the student remains a productive citizen through educational inclusionary tactics. Nancy Foster (1979) starts a mediation forum with the comment:

“When you are speaking and someone is not paying attention, how do you feel? Annoyed, frustrated, discounted, rejected, anxious or angry? Such feelings usually make communication more difficult. So how can we show someone who is speaking that we really are paying attention to them?”

I can’t help but wonder if she is speaking of a mediation situation or of a classroom? And suppose in the classroom the “you” is the student and not the teacher?

Diversity in the University—Inclusion

In *Women Teaching for Change* (1988), Kathleen Weiler admits that her original study focus was on gender. However, in interviews with teachers who were mainly white women, the importance and reality of race and class became apparent (p. 75). Weiler’s project, a qualitative research study in public schools, notes that a “weakness of liberal feminist research is that it ignores other relationships of power than those based on gender” (p. 64). She suggests that because white teachers do not consciously consider race as part of their identity, they “are not even conscious of their relationship of power and privilege” (p. 77) and consequently may be less likely to address issues of racism and classism in the classroom. Many of the feminist teachers directly addressed or attacked gender issues; however, their interaction with issues of race and class were problematic. One African American student’s comments and actions were construed as a disciplinary problem, and a working-class student’s comments were “dismissed and in a sense delegitimated” (p. 138). Weiler asserts that “recognition of conflict, oppression, and power does not mean their acceptance. It means making them conscious so they can be addressed and transformed” (145).

Even though Weiler’s research location was in a public school, I offer some suggestions to re-contextualize the research. She notes that high schools are “state institutions in many respects intended for social reproduction and control [and] at the same time sites where education can occur” (p. 151). I argue that this statement can also be applied to meditation efforts, for I believe that mediation is a process where more care is given to retune the reproductive mechanisms. So, to paraphrase Weiler, mediation can also be transformed into processes for critical thinking and learning as a proactive aspect of our societal obligations, rather than being a probationary one.

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Dr. Dallas is an assistant professor in the Department of English, teaching in the Professional and Technical Writing program at Saginaw Valley State University, located in University Center, Michigan, outside of Saginaw. She recently returned to academia after spending a number of years as a network administrator, computer systems analyst, and operations research analyst. She has extensive hands-on knowledge of personal computer (PC) and Macintosh (Mac) systems and software, including set-up and installation of computer networks, and has authored numerous web sites.

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She has developed workplace documents, including a 3-year information systems plan, a budget and planning guide for computer acquisitions, a systems policy for a Policy and Procedures Manual, prepared daily, monthly, quarterly, and annual budgets, forecasts, and actual

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Her attention to detail has served her well as an editor for a SVSU custom text, a reviewer for a literature anthology, and an assistant editor of the resource pages/bibliography for Computers and Composition Online.

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Selected publications and presentations:

(2007). Hanging on to my Commodore 64 as I stream across the technological border: Reaching and teaching others. In A. Everett and A. J. Wallace, (Eds.), *AfroGEEKS: Beyond the digital divide* (pp. 69-80). Santa Barbara, CA: The Center for Black Studies, UCSB.

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